

# Duxbury Resident Plays Key Role in Iraq War

By JOSH CUTLER

The discovery of 3,000 chemical suits in an Iraqi hospital in An Nasiriyah was an international story. For Duxbury residents it is also very much a local one.

Duxbury's own Marine Col. Ronald Johnson is the operations officer of Task Force Tarawa, the U.S. Marine unit that seized an Iraqi hospital last week. In addition to the chemical suits, 200 weapons and stockpiles of ammunition were also seized along with approximately 170 Iraqi soldiers.

A news report on CNN and a news release from U.S. Central Command on the hospital discovery both mentioned Col. Johnson by name.



Col. Ronald Johnson

"It is believed that the enemy soldiers, dressed in civilian attire were being bused into the city and were drawing

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Col. Johnson is a graduate of Duxbury High School and Lowell State University.

This is not the first time Col. Johnson has been in the spotlight during his 25-year military career. During a tour in Lebanon as a U.N. peacekeeper, Johnson's roommate, Col. Higgins, was captured and killed. Col. Johnson is also a veteran of Desert Storm.

Military service runs in the Johnson family. Col. Johnson's father, Herb, is also a marine corps veteran as is Col. Johnson's uncle. Brothers Chris, Bryan, and Tom are all Duxbury police officers.

According to news reports, Col. Johnson's unit remains outside of An Nasiriyah providing security and humanitarian aid. He is

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weapons and ammunition from the hospital in order to fight in the city," Col. Johnson said in the CentCom statement.

It was on CNN that the Johnson family first learned of the news.

"My sister-in-law [Johnson's wife Sharon] called from Camp LeJeune," said Col. Johnson's brother, Chris. "She heard his unit mentioned on TV. She missed part of the clip so she went on the Internet and saw him on their web page."

Chris Johnson said he and his family follow the war news but try not to get too caught up in it.

"There's so much coverage, we just try to go about our lives. In one sense you don't want to watch. In the same sense you try to watch and maybe catch a glimpse of him."

Chris Johnson said the family last spoke with his brother a month and a half ago while the colonel was aboard the U.S.S. Kearsarge.



Duxbury's Col. Ron Johnson is operations officer for the Marine's Task Force Tarawa. Members of the task force are pictured above in this CNN photo taken in An Nasiriyah.

with the 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines. A CNN reporter is embedded with the colonel's task force.

On Friday, Col. Johnson was quoted on CNN again stating that U.S. forces are "very close to controlling Nasiriyah and making it secure. We have the town surrounded and all the main approaches," the colonel said.

Back home, as one might expect, the Johnson's are proud. "I am glad to carry the title to call him my brother," Chris Johnson said.